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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 COLOMBO 002042

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: NEW FOREIGN MINISTER EAGER TO MAINTAIN CLOSE U.S.  
TIES, FOCUSED ON THE PEACE PROCESS

REF: COLOMBO 1994

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead for reasons 1.4 (d).

11. (C) Summary. New Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera said the GSL has proposed CFA talks to the LTTE via the Norwegian facilitators and would be flexible on the location of those talks. The landmine killings of soldiers in Jaffna make such talks especially urgent. The FM outlined the President's efforts to form a "southern consensus" on peace before engaging with the LTTE on the larger peace process and said that international involvement, especially that of the co-chairs, was more necessary than ever. He welcomed the Ambassador's overview of U.S. support for and continued involvement in the peace process and suggested they meet again before the December 19 co-chairs meeting in Brussels. Samaraweera welcomed next week's MCC visit and, in his Ports and Aviation capacity, undertook to sort out difficulties slowing down Megaports implementation in the port of Colombo. The new FM is going to be a player on the peace process and is clearly interested in maintaining close ties with us. End Summary

12. (C) The Ambassador and DCM (notetaker) called on new Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera December 6. The Minister was accompanied by newly-reappointed Foreign Secretary H.G.M.S. Palihakkara, Peace Secretariat Secretary General John Gunaratne and a Ministry notetaker.

Jaffna Killings Underline Need for CFA Review  
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13. (C) After opening pleasantries about Samaraweera's involvement in the post-tsunami Bush/Clinton visit to Sri Lanka, the new Foreign Minister said that he was speaking individually with each of the co-chair chiefs of mission to brief them on the new government's current thinking on the peace process (note: the co-chairs chiefs of mission met later on December 6, septel. End note). Samaraweera said that the GSL had just communicated to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) through the Norwegian facilitators that it wants to start immediate talks on improving implementation of the Cease-fire Agreement (CFA). This week's LTTE landmine attacks on soldiers in Jaffna (six more were killed there early on December 6) were a matter requiring "urgent attention" and therefore President Rajapakse believes that a review of "cease-fire operations" with the LTTE must begin immediately. Samaraweera said the LTTE's public assertion that the GSL in fact wants to renegotiate the terms of the CFA is not true. "We want to discuss implementation only." The Foreign Minister said the GSL would prefer to hold such talks in Colombo but is prepared to be flexible on location. Samaraweera told the Ambassador that the GSL hoped to have a substantive response from the LTTE on the proposal for CFA talks before the co-chairs meeting in Brussels on December 19.

Building the Southern Consensus for Peace  
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14. (C) Turning to the longer range strategy for peace, Samaraweera stated that all previous peace efforts had eventually failed because the government had not gained a "southern consensus" before trying to move forward with the LTTE. Tiger leader Prabhakaran had, in the past, used this lack of southern consensus as an "escape route" to avoid serious engagement on peace. President Rajapakse, the Foreign Minister continued, realizes this and for the first time in Sri Lankan history is working to develop a southern consensus as the first step towards peace. To that end, the President met on December 5 with the Buddhist JHU party and with major coalition partner JVP on December 6. Samaraweera

said the President will work his way through his entire coalition from the Liberal party which endorses federalism to the JVP which opposes it, with the President's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), which supports an Indian-style constitutional model, firmly in the middle. Samaraweera told the Ambassador "very confidentially" that this consultation process is

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already bearing fruit with the JVP having, despite their reservations, accepted that the Norwegians should continue in their facilitation role.

#### International Role Crucial

15. (C) As President Rajapakse continues to seek this southern consensus, Samaraweera said, the role of the co-chairs and the larger international community is crucial. In particular, the role of the United States is widely appreciated and valued in Sri Lanka. It is clear, the Foreign Minister said, that the Tigers only respond to "rewards and punishments" and in particular to international pressure. "The co-chairs and Norway should and must play a positive role in nudging the Tigers back to the table," Samaraweera said. "We must sit down (with the LTTE) and stop the killings and violations." Samaraweera said that the Norwegians' facilitative efforts had "not been so bad" but that, in hindsight, it had probably been a mistake to also ask them to head the monitoring effort.

#### "Enhanced" Indian Role Sought But Unlikely

16. (C) Asked about his just-concluded visit to New Delhi, Samaraweera said the Indian government "agrees with our approach" of first seeking a southern consensus while trying to shore up the CFA. The Indians had made clear their support for a continued Norwegian role. Samaraweera said he had asked the Indians to play an "enhanced" role in the peace process but came away with the clear impression that the vagaries of domestic Indian politics probably would prevent it. The Ambassador noted that the U.S. relationship with India has improved markedly in recent years and that the coordination and information-sharing on Sri Lanka is especially close.

#### U.S. Position Unchanged

17. (C) The Ambassador told the Foreign Minister that the U.S. had issued a statement in Washington strongly condemning the December 4 LTTE landmine attack on soldiers in Jaffna and that our position on the LTTE was longstanding and clear. He reviewed for the Foreign Minister the history of U.S. support for the Sri Lankan peace process and made clear that it would continue. U.S. objectives in Sri Lanka are "peace and prosperity" and the U.S. stands ready to work with any government that shares those objectives. The Ambassador reminded the Foreign Minister of U.S. military assistance and said it is designed to send a message to the LTTE that, if it should choose a return to war, it will face a stronger Sri Lankan military. The Ambassador noted that he would attend the December 19 co-chairs meeting in Brussels. Samaraweera said he would like to meet again before the Ambassador left for Brussels. The Foreign Minister said he looked forward to visiting Washington and hopefully calling on Secretary Rice but that he had no plans for

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imminent travel to the U.S.

#### Shared Democratic Values Lead to Greater Cooperation

18. (C) The Ambassador told the Foreign Minister that when former FM Kadirgamar had called on Secretary Rice earlier in the year she had been

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very interested in his account of Sri Lanka's long democratic history which underlined the U.S. view that shared democratic values should lead to coordination on key international issues. Of late, the U.S. had "noted and appreciated" the

helpful Sri Lankan statement on Iran at the IAEA Board of Governors. The Ambassador expressed hope that the U.S. and Sri Lanka would be able to similarly find common ground at the WTO meeting in Hong Kong.

#### Millennium Challenge Account

19. (C) The Ambassador briefed Samaraweera on the status of the Millennium Challenge Account, noting that Washington continued to review Sri Lanka's compact proposal. Moreover, an MCC team would be in Sri Lanka next week. The Foreign Minister said the visit was welcome and that the President would mention the MCA in his budget speech to Parliament later in the week. Palihakkara said that Finance Secretary P.B. Jayasundera would meet with the MCC

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team and that the GSL inter-ministerial MCC committee was still in operation. The Ambassador noted that he had also briefed President Rajapakse on the MCC and it was clear that the President remains very enthusiastic.

#### Megaports Logjam

10. (C) Telling the Foreign Minister that he also needed to raise an issue under the Minister's other portfolio (Samaraweera also remains Minister of Ports and Aviation), the Ambassador advised that continuing problems with Sri Lankan Customs in the port of Colombo are preventing progress towards full implementation of Megaports. Samaraweera said he was not aware of the problem but, given the importance of Megaports to Sri Lanka, would convene a meeting of relevant Ministries to sort it out and asked the Ambassador for a letter detailing the obstacles. "I will attend to it." The Ambassador noted that the Container Security Initiative (CSI) is proceeding well and that to be both a CSI and Megaports port will be a significant plus for the port of Colombo. Samaraweera agreed.

#### Comment

11. (C) Samaraweera came across well in our first encounter with him as Foreign Minister with a lowkey (reinforced by his open collar, rolled-up sleeves and sandals) but focused approach on the issues. His emphasis on the peace process underlines reports we've heard that Samaraweera will be a major player in that regard. Also encouraging is that he displayed no hesitation on deferring on details to his team members in the meeting (Palihakkara's retention is particularly good news in our view). The new Foreign Minister clearly is well-disposed to the U.S. and eager to work closely with us. Whenever Samaraweera decides to make his maiden voyage to Washington, we think high-level attention could bear fruit.  
End Comment  
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